

**Rancho La Costa
Habitat Conservation Area**

**A Dedicated Natural Open Space System Set Aside As Part
of the La Costa Villages and University Commons Developments**

**Annual Report
February 2002 - September 2002**

Prepared for:

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
California Department of Fish and Game**

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INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the management activities carried out at the Rancho La Costa Habitat Conservation Area (Preserve) by the preserve manager from February 1 to September 31, 2002. The Preserve was created by combining several areas which were dedicated to the Center for long term management from the La Costa Villages and University Commons developments. Specific parcel names have been referred to as the Oaks and Ridge, Greens, Huff, Setter, Wilern, Nelson, Brouwer, Elfin Forest and Winston. From February to about June, 2002, the Center received title to the Oaks and Ridge, Huff, Setter, Wilern and Brouwer parcels. The Nelson property was deeded to the Center in 2001, but the Center has not received the management endowment from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Therefore, management activities reported in this document refer only to the parcels under ownership and with the necessary endowments.

The Preserve is located approximately 2 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean and lies between El Camino Real, near Palomar Airport Road and Elfin forest. (see Figures 1-5 in Appendix A). The Preserve consists of several parcels separated by roads, homes, golf courses and other developments. Parcel sizes range from a few acres to over 500 acres. Vegetation communities include Diegan coastal sage scrub, chaparral, sycamore/oak woodland, willow woodland, native and non-native grassland, and disturbed areas.

The tasks and objectives discussed below are those derived from the *Habitat Management Plan for La Costa Preserve*, prepared by the Center for Natural Lands Management (Center) in August 2001 and approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Game. No management plan has been created for the University Commons or Nelson parcels. However, a revised management plan for both the La Costa and University Commons habitat conservation areas (collectively "Rancho La Costa").will be prepared once all properties and endowments of these developments have be deeded to the Center.

Management at the Preserve includes signing and maintaining fences and gates (capital improvements), biological surveys, habitat restoration, public services and reporting. Each of these activities and their Year 2002 results are summarized below and fully described within this report.

SUMMARY

- Eleven pair of coastal California gnatcatchers were observed during bird surveys. A number of other sensitive bird species were observed and noted.
- Small mammals trapping was conducted to determine presence, absence and distribution information.
- Signs were place were appropriate within the Preserve.
- Non-native plant species such as eucalyptus, castor bean, ice plant, mustard, acacia and

- pampas were removed.
- Sensitive plant species were monitored where appropriate.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

No new fencing or gating was required for the properties acquired. However, existing fences and gates were maintained as needed. About 50 signs were posted along the periphery of the Preserve and in certain interior locations. All signs state that the site is a habitat conservation area, what activities are permitted or illegal, and provides the name and phone number of the Center.

BIOLOGICAL SURVEYS

Year 2002 was the first year of biological surveys carried out by the Center at the Preserve. Previous surveys had been conducted by numerous biological consulting firms and are reported in the biological impact assessment reports and EIR's for the La Costa Villages and University Commons Open Space Areas.

The *Management Plan* outlines the goals of biological monitoring at the Preserve. The general goal of the monitoring activities at the Preserve at this time is to 1) collect baseline data and 2) begin to develop population trend data on individual species within the Preserve, and for certain taxonomic groups and the vegetation community. This information will allow us to make better informed management decisions should an individual species or population be declining, or possibly increasing, in population size. It should also allow the Center to evaluate changes in the animal community as it correlates to changes in the vegetation communities.

Monitoring in 2002 included general surveys (presence/absence) for the bird and small mammal community. Other monitoring efforts, such as herp pit arrays and sensitive plant surveys, will be conducted in 2002 once all the lands for these projects have been deeded to the Center.

Table 1 outlines survey dates, times, weather conditions and type of survey conducted. Unless noted otherwise, all surveys and monitoring activities were conducted by Markus Spiegelberg who is permitted by the USFWS and CDFG (USFWS PRT-787-924, Scientific Collectors Permit # 801106-05) for the gnatcatcher and for activities such as small mammal trapping. A description of survey methods and results of surveys are described below and in Table 2 and Appendix B.

1. Reptile and Amphibians

Reptiles and amphibians were noted anecdotally during surveys for other taxa. Species observed are the red-diamond back rattlesnake (*Crotalus ruber*), southern pacific rattlesnake (*Crotalus*

viridis) the side-blotched lizard (*Uta stansburiana*), orange-throated whiptail (*Cnemidophorus hyperythrus beldingi*), western whiptail (*Cnemidophorus tigris*), western fence lizard (*Sceloporus occidentalis*), San Diego gopher snake (*Pituophis catenifer annectens*), California whipsnake (*Masticophis lateralis lateralis*) and coast horned lizard scat (*Phrynosoma coronatum*). A list of the species observed during the 2002 season is shown in Appendix B and sensitive species are mapped on Figure 6 in Appendix A.

Table 1. Survey dates, times and weather conditions.

| Survey Date | Time | Weather Conditions | Type of Survey* | Location |
|-------------------|---|-------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| February 21, 2002 | 07:45 - 12:00 | Clear, 5 mph wind, 55-60 °F | AC, CAGN | Oaks and Ridge |
| February 27, 2002 | 07:30 - 10:30 | Clear, calm, 57-75 °F | AC, CAGN | Oaks and Ridge |
| March 25, 2002 | 07:50 - 10:00 | Clear, calm, 55-65 °F | AC, CAGN, | Oaks and Ridge |
| March 26, 2002 | 07:30 - 11:30 | Clear, calm, 58-68 °F | AC, CAGN | Oaks and Ridge |
| April 1, 2002 | 08:00 - 11:00 | Cloudy, 60-65 °F | AC, CAGN | U.C./Brouwer |
| April 9, 2002 | 07:00 -11:00 | Overcast, calm, 60-65 °F | AC, CAGN, | Oaks and Ridge |
| April 19, 2002 | 06:30 - 9:30 | Clear, 58-70 °F | AC, CAGN | U.C./Brouwer |
| April 24, 2002 | 06:30 - 10:30 | Partly cloudy, calm, 58-60 °F | AC, CAGN | Oaks and Ridge |
| May 2, 2002 | 06:15 - 11:15 | Clear, calm, 60-70 °F | AC, CAGN | Oaks and Ridge |
| June 18-19, 2002 | Bait in evening, check in mornings | Overcast, calm, 60 °F | SMT | Oaks and Ridge, U.C./Huff/Setter |
| July 2-3, 2002 | Bait in evenings, check in mornings | Overcast, calm, 60-65 °F | SMT | Oaks and Ridge, U.C./Brouwer |
| | | | | |

* CAGN = Directed survey for coastal California gnatcatcher.

SMT=small mammal trapping. AC = Avian community.

2. Birds

The goal of bird surveys in 2002 was to determine the distribution and abundance of coastal California gnatcatchers, and to note all species observed during surveys (presense/absence). In addition, these initial surveys were conducted to allow the preserve manager to become familiar with the preserve area. Population level surveys (point counts) will be conducted in the future once all the properties are dedicated to the Center.

Avian surveys were conducted from late February to early May, 2002 (Table 1). Surveys were

conducted on the Oaks and Ridge parcels and the Brouwer parcel of the University Commons project. Avian surveys were also conducted by Shana Dodd of S.C. Dodd biological consulting on the Wilern parcel in the month of March as part of a separate consulting project. No avian surveys were conducted on the Huff, Setter or Nelson properties as these properties were deeded and endowed outside the survey period or do not have their endowments at all (Nelson).

Surveys included mapping and noting particular behaviors of the coastal California gnatcatcher, and other sensitive bird species. Any nesting behavior or evidence of nesting or nesting success, was noted for all species. Taped vocalizations of gnatcatchers were used as necessary.

Survey results and notes are listed in Appendix B, and sensitive and notable species are mapped on Figure 6 in Appendix A. Sensitive species observed include the gnatcatcher, rufous-crowned sparrow, and Cooper's hawk. Other notable observations two nesting pair of red-tailed hawk (see Figure 6 in Appendix A). One nested in the oak woodland at the terminus of La Costa Avenue, and one nested in the cliff face of the Brouwer parcel. Both nest had nestlings and fledges from both nests were observed during surveys.

Eleven pair of gnatcatcher was observed within the survey areas (Figure 6). Breeding activity and behaviors were noted for several gnatcatcher pairs, and a family group was noted for one pair.

3. Mammals

Surveys for mammals include noting large or medium sized mammals during surveys for other taxa, and directed surveys for small mammals. Small mammal trapping was conducted to determine presence, absence and distribution information for these species. Trapping was conducted by the Preserve Manager and Shana Dodd of S.C. Dodd Biological Consulting.

Small mammal trapping consisted of 12 study locations at which 1 or 2 trap lines of 20-40 traps were set. Each trap line was trapped to 2 nights. Trapping dates were June 18 and 19 and July 2 and 3, 2002. Traps were opened and baited just before sunset, and check and closed just after sunrise. Weather was overcast during both trapping sessions, with temperatures from 60-65 F (Table 1).

Small mammals captured were San Diego pocket mouse (*Chaetodipus fallax*), San Diego desert woodrat (*Neotoma lepida intermedia*), deer mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*), cactus mouse (*Peromyscus eremicus*), western harvest mouse (*Reithrodontomys megalotis*) and Delzura kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys simulens*). Table 2 shows the trapping results by trap line which are depicted on Figure 7 in Appendix A.

Other mammals observed during surveys include cottontail rabbit (*Sylvilagus audubonii*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), California ground squirrel (*Spermophilus beecheyi*) and mule deer (*Odocoileus*

hemionus) scat.

Table 2. Small mammal trapping results by trapline.

| | Species Captured by Transect Line* | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| Species | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Chaetodipus f. fallax</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| <i>N. lepida intermedia</i> | X | X | | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X |
| <i>P. maniculatus</i> | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | | X | | X |
| <i>P. eremicus</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| <i>R. megalotis</i> | | X | | X | | X | X | | | X | | |
| <i>Dipodomys simulens</i> | X | | | | | X | | | | X | | |

*see Figure 8 in Appendix A.

4. Vegetation Sampling

Due to poor rain condition and the fact that not all properties have been received by the Center, vegetation sampling did not occur in 2002, but will occur in 2003.

5. Sensitive Plants

The goal for sensitive plant species monitoring at this time is to map the distribution and estimate the population sizes of each species. Due to poor rain conditions, only a few surveys were conducted as many annual species were not expected to sprout. One survey was conducted to map the distribution of western dichondra (*Dichondra occidentalis*). Numerous individuals were observed on the western side of Box Canyon. Their distribution and estimated abundances have been mapped and entered into GIS. A complete survey for sensitive plant species will be conducted on all parcels in 2003.

HABITAT RESTORATION

Habitat restoration goals for the Preserve at this time include removing non-native plants and may in the future include other tasks. Most of the Preserve is not overly disturbed by non-native

plant species. However, there are several populations of pampas grass, eucalyptus, fennel, ice plant and other non-native species. Also, it should be noted that habitat restoration activities, which include non-native plant removal, will be conducted in 2003 on the Brouwer and Huff parcels by Brookfield Homes, the developer of the University Commons Open Space. In addition, due to poor rain conditions, certain non-native species did not sprout or were not abundant, such as star thistle and mustard.

In 2002, over 50 pampas grass clumps, 500 fennel clumps, a small patch of ice plant and other non-native were cut and/or sprayed using herbicide. Pampas continues to sprout here and there within the Preserve and is sprayed or removed accordingly. No other restoration activities were undertaken in 2002.

PUBLIC SERVICE

CNLM public service activities include patrolling, community letters, nature walks and public education. In 2002, most of the public service activities at the Preserve involved patrolling and enforcement and meeting with easement holders. Appendix C summarizes all site activities for 2002. At this time, the western portion of the Preserve (Box Canyon) is posted as "No Trespassing". This is either because the Center does not want people in the canyon area, or because access to the Preserve requires people to cross over private land. The eastern portions of the Preserve are open to the public for hiking and mountain biking, but no motorized vehicles or firearms are allowed.

The Center patrolled the Preserve on a regular basis, sometimes during biological surveys and sometimes during directed patrolling efforts. In addition, the Center hired Rancho Santa Fe Security to patrol the Box Canyon area from July 1 to October 1, 2002 to keep people out of the canyon areas. Rancho Santa Fe Security would pass by the site 3 times a day, 7 days a week for about 20 minutes at each visit. Each security officer descended about 100 feet down the canyon side and drove along access roads to look for trespassers. If trespassers were observed, the police department was contacted, and Ranch Santa Fe Security would escort the individuals off the site and to the police officers. Over 100 people were evicted from the canyon and about 25 citations were issued by the Police department. CNLM patrols were conducted at 1 to 2 times per week.

In general the Preserve does not see an excessive amount of negative use by people in the area. Motorcycles are observed on occasion, and some idiots crashed through a fence and started a bonfire on the Nelson property in mid summer. The Preserve will be easier to enforce once all the parcels are acquired and proper fencing can be installed.

REPORTING

Reporting activities include report writing, all data analysis, GIS, meetings and regional coordination, and photo documentation activities.

Data that has been entered into ARCVIEW GIS includes sensitive species locations, parcel boundaries, small mammal transect locations and the distribution of western dichondra..

Photographs were taken in 2002 to document the non-native removal activities.

At this time preserve management is following the guidelines established in the Habitat Management Plan for the La Costa Preserve prepared by the Center in August 2001 and approved by the wildlife agencies. This Plan only address issues on the La Costa Villages open space areas, and not those on the other parcels. However, the goals are very similar and the management activities can occur simultaneously since the parcels are either adjacent or very near to one another. The Center has requested (separate from this document) from the CDFG and USFWS the permission to merge the accounting, reporting and management of all the parcels listed in this report. The Center was granted permission to merge reporting and therefore, will redraft the management plan to represent all properties as soon as all properties are deeded to the Center.

This report represents the first annual report for the Preserve. An annual work plan for 2002-3 will be provided to the wildlife agencies in December of 2002.

Finally, the Preserve manager has maintained all necessary agency permits to allow the continued monitoring of the Preserve's biota.

SUMMARY & DISCUSSION

Management at the Rancho La Costa Habitat Conservation Area in the first year was successful at protecting the Preserve from human encroachment, building baseline biological data, removing non-natives and developing a better understanding of the Preserve and its regional context. Preserve management in the second year will involve more biological surveys, non-native removal and public outreach. A detailed work plan for the Year 2002-2003 fiscal year has been developed for this purpose.

Appendix A.

Figures 1-7 Preserve Location Maps Sensitive Species Map Small Mammal Trapline Map

Appendix B.

Animal Species Observed

| Species Name | Scientific Name | Notes |
|------------------------------|---|-------|
| Invertebrates | | |
| Perplexing hairstreak | <i>Callophrys affinis perplexa</i> | |
| Behr's metalmark | <i>Apodemia mormo virgulti</i> | |
| Southern blue | <i>Glaucopsyche lygdamus australis</i> | |
| California ringlet | <i>Coenonympha californica</i> | |
| Lorquin's admiral | <i>Liminitis lorquini lorquini</i> | |
| Anise swallowtail | <i>Papilio zelicaon zelicaon</i> | |
| Sara orangetip | <i>Anthocharis sara</i> | |
| Velvet Ant (red variety) | | |
| Dragonfly | Family Libellulidae | |
| Harvester ants | Family Formicidae | |
| Mammals | | |
| San Diego desert woodrat | <i>Neotoma lepida intermedia</i> | |
| Deer mouse | <i>Peromyscus maniculatus</i> | |
| Cactus mouse | <i>Peromyscus eremicus</i> | |
| San Diego pocket mouse | <i>Chaetodipus fallax fallax</i> | |
| Western harvest mouse | <i>Reithrodontomys megalotis</i> | |
| Delzura kangaroo rat | <i>Dipodomys simulens</i> | |
| Cottontail rabbit | <i>Sylvilagus audubonii</i> | |
| Coyote | <i>Canis latrans</i> | |
| California ground squirrel | <i>Spermophilus beecheyi</i> | |
| Black-tailed jack rabbit | <i>Lepus californicus bennettii</i> | |
| Mule deer | <i>Odocoileus hemionus</i> | scat |
| Herpetofauna | | |
| Western whiptail | <i>Cnemidophorus tigris</i> | |
| Orange-throated whiptail | <i>Cnemidophorus hyperythrus beldingi</i> | |
| Side-blotched lizard | <i>Uta stansburiana</i> | |
| Western fence lizard | <i>Sceloporus occidentalis</i> | |
| San Diego horned lizard | <i>Phrynosoma coronatum blainvillii</i> | scat |
| Southern pacific rattlesnake | <i>Crotalus viridis</i> | |
| Red-diamondback rattlesnake | <i>Crotalus exsul (= ruber ruber)</i> | |
| Gopher snake | <i>Pituophis catenifer annectens</i> | |
| California whipsnake | <i>Masticophis lateralis lateralis</i> | |

Appendix A, continued

Bird survey results.

| Species | Year 2002 Notes |
|------------------------------|---|
| Resident | |
| Anna's hummingbird | |
| Bewicks wren | |
| Bell's sage sparrow | |
| Black phoebe | |
| Bushtit | |
| California gnatcatcher | DB |
| California quail | |
| California thrasher | |
| California towhee | |
| Canyon wren | |
| Common yellowthroat | |
| Costa's hummingbird | |
| House finch | |
| Lesser goldfinch | |
| Morning dove | |
| Northern mockingbird | |
| Rufous-crowned sparrow | |
| Song sparrow | |
| Spotted towhee | |
| Western meadowlark | |
| Western scrub jay | |
| Wrentit | |
| Fly-overs or Uncommon | |
| American crow | |
| American kestrel | |
| Cassin's kingbird | |
| Cliff swallow | |
| Common raven | |
| Cooper's hawk | |
| Grasshopper sparrow | |
| Great blue heron | |
| Great egret | |
| Greater roadrunner | |
| Horned lark | |
| Loggerhead shrike | |
| Northern flicker | |
| Northern harrier | |
| Owl sp. | |
| Nuttall's woodpecker | |
| Poor-will | |
| Red-tailed hawk | |
| Red-shouldered hawk | 2 nests observed with nestlings, both were successful |
| Savannah sparrow | |
| Turkey vulture | |

| Species | Year 2002 Notes |
|------------------|------------------------|
| Western kingbird | |
| Western tanager | |

White-throated swift

Migrants

Ash-throated flycatcher

Blue-gray gnatcatcher

Orange-crowned warbler

Say's phoebe

White-crowned sparrow

Swainson's thrush not positive i.d.

Pacific-sloped flycatcher

Lazuli bunting

Blue grosbeak

Black-headed grosbeak

Yellow-rumped warbler

NO= Nest observed; DB= Definite breeder; LB= Likely breeder; PN= Possible breeder.

Appendix C.

Summary of Site Visit Activities

| Date | Parcel | Activity | Hours |
|--------------------|--------------------|--|-------|
| 13-Feb-02 | La Costa | Patrol | 3 |
| 13-Feb-02 | La Costa | Patrol | 3 |
| 21-Feb-02 | La Costa | Bird community survey | 8 |
| 27-Feb-02 | La Costa | Bird survey | 8 |
| 18-Mar-02 | University Commons | Site evaluation/ patrol | 2 |
| 25-Mar-02 | La Costa | Bird survey | 4.5 |
| 26-Mar-02 | La Costa | Bird survey | 5.5 |
| 26-Mar-02 | La Costa | Kill 200 fennel 20 pampas | 2.5 |
| 01-Apr-02 | University Commons | Bird survey on Brouwer property, patrol | 5 |
| 04-Apr-02 | University Commons | Spray pampas and fennel | 2 |
| 09-Apr-02 | La Costa | Bird survey | 5 |
| 12-Apr-02 | La Costa | Map Dicondra population | 5 |
| 19-Apr-02 | University Commons | Bird survey and spray about 100 fennel clumps | 6 |
| 24-Apr-02 | La Costa | Bird survey | 4 |
| 02-May-02 | La Costa | Bird survey and spray 15 pampas and 50 fennel | 6 |
| 06-May-02 | University Commons | Patrol, take photo's | 1.5 |
| 08-May-02 | La Costa | Patrol | 2 |
| 08-May-02 | University Commons | Patrol | 2 |
| 15-May-02 | La Costa | Check and work on fuel zones | 4 |
| 15-May-02 | University Commons | Patrol | 1 |
| 16-May-02 | La Costa | Work on clearing fuel breaks | 8 |
| 20-May-02 | La Costa | Work on clearing fuel breaks | 6 |
| 21-May-02 | La Costa | Work on clearing fuel breaks | 5 |
| 29-May-02 | La Costa | Patrol | 2 |
| 29-May-02 | University Commons | Patrol | 2 |
| 05-Jun-02 | University Commons | Patrol, pick up trash | 7 |
| 06-Jun-02 | La Costa | Patrol, general biology survey | 8 |
| 11-Jun-02 | University Commons | Patrol, determine sign and fence locations | 4 |
| 11-Jun-02 | La Costa | Patrol, pick up trash, kill 150 fennel | 4 |
| 13-Jun-02 | La Costa | Patrol | 3 |
| 13-Jun-02 | University Commons | Patrol | 3 |
| 17-19-Jun-02 | La Costa | Trap small mammals | 20 |
| 26-Jun-02 | University Commons | Patrol, pick up trash | 5 |
| 01-July-30-Sept-02 | La Costa | Rancho Santa Fe Security Services/ 3 times daily | |
| 1-3-Jul-02 | La Costa | Small mammal trapping | 20 |
| 1-3-Jul-02 | University Commons | Small mammal trapping | 20 |
| 08-Jul-02 | La Costa | Spray 30 pampas | 1.5 |
| 11-Jul-02 | La Costa | Patrol | 3 |

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| | | | |
|-----------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|-----|
| 11-Jul-02 | University Commons | Patrol | 3 |
| 17-Jul-02 | La Costa | Set sign, set up some fencing, patrol | 8 |
| 19-Jul-02 | University Commons | Set signs, patrol and pick up trash | 8 |
| 29-Jul-02 | La Costa | Set signs, patrol and pick up trash | 2.5 |
| 29-Jul-02 | University Commons | Set signs, patrol and pick up trash | 2.5 |
| 01-Aug-02 | La Costa | Meet BLM at Nelson | 2 |
| 05-Aug-02 | University Commons | Herp survey at brouwer | 3.5 |
| 05-Aug-02 | La Costa | Patrol east box canyon | 1.5 |
| 26-Aug-02 | La Costa | Patrol | 2 |
| 26-Aug-02 | University Commons | Patrol | 2 |
| 13-Sep-02 | La Costa | Patrol | 3 |
| 19-Sep-02 | La Costa | Patrol, pick up trash | 3 |
| 19-Sep-02 | University Commons | Patrol, pick up trash | 2 |
| 27-Sep-02 | La Costa | Patrol | 2 |
| 27-Sep-02 | University Commons | Patrol | 1.5 |